

REMOVAL OF INJUNCTION OF SECRECY—TREATY DOCUMENT NO. 105-27

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, as in executive session, I ask unanimous consent that the injunction of secrecy be removed from the following treaty transmitted to the Senate on September 18, 1997, by the President of the United States:

Treaty with Australia on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters—Treaty document No. 105-27.

I further ask that the treaty be considered as having been read the first time; that it be referred with accompanying papers, to the Committee on Foreign Relations and ordered to be printed; and that the President's message be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The message of the President is as follows:

*To the Senate of the United States:*

With a view to receiving the advice and consent of the Senate to ratification, I transmit herewith the Treaty Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Australia on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, signed at Washington on April 30, 1997, and a related exchange of diplomatic notes signed the same date. I transmit also, for the information of the Senate, the report of the Department of State with respect to the Treaty.

The Treaty is one of a series of modern mutual legal assistance treaties being negotiated by the United States in order to counter criminal activities more effectively. The Treaty should be an effective tool to assist in the prosecution of a wide variety of crimes, including drug trafficking offenses, terrorism and other violent crime, money laundering and other "white-collar" crime. The Treaty is self-executing.

The Treaty provides for a broad range of cooperation in criminal matters. Mutual assistance available under the Treaty includes: taking testimony or statements of persons; providing documents, records, and other articles of evidence; serving documents; locating or identifying persons; transferring persons in custody for testimony or other purposes; executing requests for searches and seizures and for restitution; immobilizing instrumentalities and proceeds of crime; assisting in proceedings related to forfeiture or confiscation; and rendering any other form of assistance not prohibited by the laws of the Requested State.

I recommend that the Senate give early and favorable consideration to the Treaty and related exchange of notes, and give its advice and consent to ratification.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON.

THE WHITE HOUSE, September 18, 1997.

APPOINTMENT OF ADDITIONAL CONFEREES—H.R. 2378

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator STE-

VENS and Senator BYRD be added as conferees to H.R. 2378, the Treasury-Postal appropriations bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RELIGIOUS WORKERS ACT OF 1997

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senate proceed to the consideration of S. 1198, introduced earlier today by Senator ABRAHAM.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1198) to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to provide permanent authority for entry into the United States of certain religious workers.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the immediate consideration of the bill?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce legislation to provide permanent authority for 5,000 visas per year for religious groups to use to sponsor for permanent residency people who come to this country to do God's work.

Mr. President, the Immigration Act of 1990 took a significant step in recognizing the needs of America's religious institutions by creating these religious worker visas. At that time the Act only provided temporary authority for this program in order to see how it would work. I think we have now had enough experience with it to know that it works very well. The time has come to place religious institutions on an equal footing with businesses and universities with regards to sponsoring needed workers by giving these visas the same status as all our other immigrant visas.

Prior to 1990, churches, synagogues, mosques, and their affiliated organizations experienced significant difficulties in trying to gain admission for a much needed minister or other individual necessary to provide religious services to their communities. The 1990 Act changed that. It set aside 10,000 visas per year for "special immigrants." Up to 5,000 of these visas annually can be used for ministers of a religious denomination.

In addition, a related provision of the law provides 5,000 visas per year to individuals working for religious organizations in "a religious vocation or occupation" or in a "professional capacity in a religious vocation or occupation." This has allowed nuns, brothers, cantors, lay preachers, religious instructors, religious counselors, missionaries, and other persons to work at their vocations or occupations for religious organizations or their affiliates. The sponsoring organization must be a bona fide religious organization or an affiliate of one, and must be certified or eligible to be certified under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Religious workers must have two years work experience to qualify for an immigrant visa. The authority for these visas is what expires this year.

Mr. President, we often hear the charge that immigrants are somehow taking from our communities, when, as I heard at a recent subcommittee hearing on this subject, the opposite is much more often the case. As Bishop John Cummins of Oakland has written: "Religious workers provide a very important pastoral function to the American communities in which they work and live, performing activities in furtherance of a vocation or religious occupation often possessing characteristics unique from those found in the general labor market. Historically, religious workers have staffed hospitals, orphanages, senior care homes and other charitable institutions that provide benefits to society without public funding."

Bishop Cummins notes that "The steady decline in native-born Americans entering religious vocations and occupations, coupled with the dramatically increasing need for charitable services in impoverished communities makes the extension of this special immigrant provision a necessity for numerous religious denominations in the United States."

Mr. President, I and I am sure most Americans share Bishop Cummins' views. Indeed the special immigrant program has won universal praise in religious communities across the nation. Our office has received letters from religious orders and organizations throughout the nation. A recent letter signed jointly by Jewish, Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran and Evangelical organizations states: "Failure to extend the [special immigrant visa categories] would substantially undermine the services that religious denominations and organizations in the United States provide to their members, parishioners, and communities."

Mr. President, our nation was founded by people who came to these shores in search of a place where they and their children could worship freely. It is only fitting that our country welcome those who wish to help our religious organizations provide pastoral and other relief to people in need.

That is why I am introducing "The Religious Workers Act of 1997." This bill will eliminate the sunset provisions and extend permanently the religious workers provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act. I believe religious organizations' ability to sponsor individuals who provide service to their local communities should be a permanent fixture of our immigration law, just as it is for those petitioning for close family members and skilled workers. No longer should religious institutions have to worry about whether Congress will act in time to renew the religious workers provisions. I am pleased that the entire leadership of the Senate Judiciary Committee and its Immigration Subcommittee—Senators KENNEDY, HATCH, LEAHY and I—